Excellence in European Doctoral Education: Innovation and Enhancement Conference

Jointly hosted by the University of Edinburgh and Aarhus University

28th and 29th November 2013

John McIntyre Conference Centre, Edinburgh

Conference Report

Report compiled and written by Dr Fiona Philippi on behalf of the ExEDE project team

Contents

What is excellence in European doctoral education?

'word cloud created using www.wordle.net based on speed networking discussions held at the conference on the topic, What is excellence in European doctoral education?'

Executive Summary

The Excellence in Doctoral Education: Innovation and Enhancement Conference was jointly hosted by the University of Edinburgh and Aarhus University, and held at the John McIntyre Conference Centre in Edinburgh on the 28th and 29th of November 2013. The conference attracted over 50 delegates from 7 different European countries and this included a sizeable delegation from both the host institutions. A range of different professional and academic roles were represented and participants included individuals with roles in internationalisation, European policy, quality assurance and researcher development as well as Graduate School and research programme directors, PhD supervisors, support staff and PhD researchers.

The four main conference themes were derived from the work packages of the jointly-led University of Edinburgh and Aarhus University project, Excellence in European Doctoral Education (ExEDE). The themes were as follows:

➢ **International dimensions to examination, supervision and the doctoral experience**

➢ **Encouraging and recording personal and professional development activities undertaken within and alongside a doctorate**

➢ **Employer engagement, including employers not traditionally associated with the recruitment of doctoral graduates**

➢ **Approaches to training and support for doctoral candidates and supervisors**

Throughout the conference these themes were addressed by various speakers, discussion groups and interactive workshops. A key objective of the conference was to facilitate opportunities for delegates to engage and interact with these themes and to network and share practice.

The opening session had two main parts. In the first, Professor Johnny Laursen (Aarhus University) and Dr Jon Turner (University of Edinburgh) welcomed delegates and gave an overview of the ExEDE project and conference aims.

Following this, Dr Conor O' Carroll (Irish Universities Association) gave an informative presentation on the current European approach to doctoral training.

The remainder of the first day was divided into two sets of interactive workshops. A speed networking session was then held prior to the conference dinner.

The second day started with another set of interactive workshops. The closing session then asked delegates to form discussion groups in order to summarise and identify some of the key points and questions raised and discussed throughout the two days. These observations and questions were then presented to a panel for comment.

This report is designed to summarise the main discussion points raised at the conference, to gather some examples of practice and to suggest recommendations for further work in the future. Instead of reporting on the conference in a chronological manner, rather it starts with the opening and key note addresses and then summarises discussion from workshops on the four main themes. It concludes with an overview of the discussion and recommendations made in the final session and feedback on the conference from participants.

Although discussions throughout the two days were wide ranging, a number of key recommendations for the sector can be identified.

Key recommendations for the sector

(i) To build frameworks (for supervisory arrangements, mobility, researcher support and development) which recognise and support the increasing diversity in research and in researchers.

(ii) For these frameworks to secure the quality of the research and research training environment whilst providing sufficient flexibility to respond to the varied backgrounds, aspirations and motivations of individual doctoral researchers.

(iii) To address and support the transition stage from completing a PhD to becoming an independent researcher (in academia and a wide range of other careers).

(iv) To embrace a broader interpretation of industry and employer engagement with doctoral programmes and to build frameworks which make partnerships between academia and employers easier to set up and develop.

(v) To develop a common understanding of the core value and purpose of the PhD in Europe, for instance based on strengthening the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (PIDT).

(vi) To invest in the process of developing in-depth international partnerships which ensure long term quality and sustainability.

(vii) To explore examples of best practice to inform and design well-balanced and advanced international partnerships.

Opening Session

Professor Johnny Laursen, *Head of Graduate School, Arts, Aarhus University*
Dr Jon Turner, *Director of the Institute for Academic Development, University of Edinburgh*

Background to the ExEDE project

An initial discussion between the Principal of the University of Edinburgh and the former Rector of Aarhus University identified a common desire to unpick and explore the various principles and concepts of excellence in European doctoral education found in many European and national reports. As both institutions already have excellent international reputations for doctoral education and training, the impetus was to identify and share innovative practice in order to reach a common understanding of what is meant by excellence in this area.

A High Level Dialogue meeting was held in Aarhus in 2012 to build on this and it identified the following five key recommendations which should be emphasised when aspiring to excellence in European doctoral education:

- An explicit international dimension to examination, supervision and the doctoral experience
- The centrality of high quality independent research in an active and vibrant research environment as the basis for the award of a doctoral degree
- The key output of doctoral education should be the researcher themselves
- An explicit focus on personal and professional development throughout PhD and consideration of how best to this should be recognised and validated
- The continuing importance of developing and supporting innovative approaches to training and support for doctoral candidates (with a particular focus on employability and mobility)
- The need to recognise potential benefits of strengthening approaches to engagement with employers and other external organisations
- The importance of addressing the support and training needs of doctoral supervisors

One Year Pilot Project

To begin to address some of these recommendations, it was agreed to run a one year scoping project called, Excellence in Doctoral Education (ExEDE). This project, which runs from spring 2013 to spring 2014, looks at the challenges posed by the implementation of these recommendations and the feasibility for further collaboration. It has four main objectives:

Main Objectives of the ExEDE Project

- To identify effective interventions and approaches with potential for extension or expansion – this has focussed on the identification and documentation of a series of case studies linked to specific thematic areas
- To explore some of the key issues & challenges around specific recommendations (e.g. joint degrees, doctoral supplements)
- To initiate a series of joint doctorates intended to exemplify and further explore these recommendations
- To consider the potential for developing a proposal for external funding to further develop this work with additional partners

The Conference

The conference represented a significant part of this project as it gathered colleagues from a variety of European institutions to discuss the challenges of defining and achieving excellence. It also allowed participants to identify important ideas, share approaches and to explore the potential for further work and collaboration. It was designed to be highly participatory, both to facilitate networking and collaboration and to encourage participants to consider, explore and discuss the issues. The outputs from these in-depth discussions will help inform the work and priorities for the project.

More information on the High Level Dialogue and the ExEDE project is available on the project webpages: http://www.au.dk/en/doctoralexcellence/doctoralexcellence/

Key Note Address – 'The PhD in Europe or a European PhD'

Dr Conor O'Carroll, *Head of Research Office, Irish Universities Association and Chair, EC Steering Group for Human Resources and Mobility*

European Commission Steering Group for Human Resources and Mobility

Dr O'Carroll began by giving a brief overview of the European Commission Steering Group for Human Resources and Mobility. He emphasised that this group has a broad base which incorporates the EU member states and also candidate and associated countries. Although it is an EC initiative, it acts independently of the Commission. This allows for deeper discussion and negotiation with the Commission. Some of the key achievements of the steering group since its inception in 2001 are:

- The European Charter for Researchers
- The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers
- Fast Track 'Scientific Visa'
- Development of over 200 EURAXESS Service Centres
- The European Framework for Research Careers
- The Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (PIDT)

These developments have had a significant impact on European policy and approach over recent years. For instance, the PIDT now underpins the research training element of Horizon 2020.

What is the PhD?

It was then explained that a PhD is both a degree and a licence to do research. Developments over the last 30 years mean that the master-apprentice model of a PhD is now generally less relevant and that a PhD is now seen as the entry qualification for further research. Dr O'Carroll reiterated that a PhD is a high value qualification but that there remains huge diversity across Europe in the status of a PhD researcher. He also highlighted some apparent contradictions in current policy and approach. For example, the strong drive in European investment into research means that more PhDs are required to fulfil research needs. However, studies have shown that a small percentage of PhD

graduates will become academic researchers. This also goes against the career expectations of many PhD researchers.

The Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (PIDT)

Dr O'Carroll explained that the seven principles are intertwined and when read together form a framework for research training in Europe. Importantly they are not designed to change the nature or format of the PhD degree. The seven principles are as follows:

Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (PIDT)

1. Research Excellence
2. Attractive Institutional Environment
3. Interdisciplinary Research Options
4. Exposure to Industry and Other Relevant Employers – 'industry' should be broadly interpreted and exposure can be through a variety of mechanisms
5. International Networking – this is a core part and mechanisms can vary
6. Transferable Skills Training
7. Quality Assurance – this is assurance of the governance of the PhD rather than the degree itself

European Commission (2011). Available at:
http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Principles_for_Innovative_Doctoral_Training.pdf

It was emphasised that across Europe there is great diversity in the implementation of these principles and that a working group is currently looking at the PIDT and exploring some of the principles and issues further in order to identify clearer explanations of the terms.

The speech was concluded by the statement that there is no such thing as a European PhD and that there never will be; instead we should strive towards a common framework for all PhDs in Europe. This will lead to realistic expectations for PhD researchers and support them to have meaningful careers in all parts of society.

Theme One:

International dimensions to examination, supervision and the doctoral experience

Overview

Collaboration between European institutions in terms of joint PhD programmes often forms a key part of institutional strategy for greater internationalisation. The potential benefits of this approach for institutions, individuals and research excellence seem clear, yet are not always fully realised. In addition, such collaborations are frequently challenging to initiate, set up and develop. As the number of joint PhD programmes rises, the need to assess the impact of these on institutions, individuals and society at large also increases. Although there are common European principles on doctoral education, differences in interpretation and approach remain. Three of the workshops at the conference helped address some of these challenges and provide examples of practice from across Europe. These were:

➢ Developing and managing in-depth joint doctoral programmes: Opportunities and Challenges;
➢ Unpicking the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (PIDT);
➢ Joint doctoral programmes: Assessing the impact

Workshop summary One

Developing and managing in-depth joint doctoral programmes: Opportunities and Challenges
Dr Dorothy Watson, Head of International Strategy and Partnerships, University of Edinburgh
Dr Nathalie Mather L'Huillier, Postgraduate Student Recruitment and Admissions Manager, University of Edinburgh

The workshop began with an overview of the principles and objectives which underpin jointly-awarded doctorates. This helped to focus participants on the fundamental questions of why we should undertake joint-degree programmes and these were further explored through a discussion session which questioned the benefits of this approach for different stakeholders. The following key benefits for students, institutions and the region were identified:

For students:
- Student mobility
- Acquisition of additional research skills
- Exposure to two different high quality research environments
- Head start in networking, career prospects etc.

For the institution:
- Encouraging research as a career for high calibre students
- Enhanced recruitment of excellent graduate students
- International research collaboration
- Increased capacity to leverage research funding
- The added value of international networking

For the region:
- Knowledge exchange and sharing of research, learning and resources
- Recognition of partner university qualifications in other countries
- Increased attractiveness of institutions by strengthening national, European and international networks

Having reached a consensus on some of the potential benefits of the joint approach, the presenters then outlined some of the technicalities of setting up joint agreements and shared some specificities of the University of Edinburgh approach. They highlighted two common routes (the student-led route and the academic-led route) to setting up new agreements and asked participants to discuss the opportunities and challenges associated with each route. Some of the questions and considerations raised are summarised below:

Student-Led Approach – where a student wishes to do a PhD jointly with another institution. In some cases there could be an existing agreement with the potential partner institution, in others there is no agreement.

Considerations for the student-led approach
- Is there support from the supervisors?
- Is it appropriate to have student involvement in setting up the agreement if there is no existing agreement?
- What are the student's motivations for this approach?
- Will the student have adequate access to research and transferable skills training?
- Would the proposed joint- approach have enough value to justify the associated administrative workload?
- What are the expectations from the partner institution? Are there funding issues?
- Is this the best option for the student? Are there any viable alternatives?

Academic-Led Approach – where an academic wishes to set up a joint-PhD agreement with another institution. In some cases there could be existing research collaboration, in others there is no existing agreement.

Considerations for the academic-led route

➢ Is there senior management support for the collaboration?
➢ Has recruitment been considered?
➢ Have all potential funding opportunities been explored?

Final recommendations and suggestions for all routes

- Important for each student to have a memorandum of agreement
- Plan for all aspects – including recruitment, admission, funding, quality assurance, examination, graduation. Have a contingency plan if things go wrong
- Ensure you provide students and supervisors with clear information on how to proceed. Important to have readily available guidelines and template documents.

Workshop Summary Two:

Unpicking the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (PIDT)
Professor Johnny Laursen, Head of Graduate School, Arts, Aarhus University

In this workshop, Professor Laursen built on the introduction to the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (PIDT) given by Dr O' Carroll in the opening session. He started by giving participants an overview of the PIDT and then explaining some of the current challenges posed by these for member states and the European Research Area more generally.

Key Challenges of implementing the PIDT across Europe

- What is the status of a doctoral researcher at an institution? Currently, this varies from an employee in some states to a student in others.
- How can assessment and evaluation be made compatible and recognised across all member states? Currently assessment practices vary from a closed viva system in some countries to an open defence in others. There are also differences in the number of examiners and the use of external assessors.
- How can the quality of personal and professional skills be assured in a consistent manner across Europe?
- What are the barriers to links with industry?
- What is meant by innovation in the doctoral field?

The participants were then invited to respond and identify further challenges and considerations.

Some of the challenges raised by participants were as follows:

- Creating a suitable environment to develop a doctoral candidate as person and as an independent researcher
- Overcoming bureaucratic and time constraints to make effective links with industry
- Reaching a common agreement about what constitutes research output
- Understanding what is meant by doctoral training and ensuring quality

Much of the discussion focused on the challenge of preparing doctoral candidates for the next part of their career. This was something that was recognised by colleagues from a number of different

European countries. The discussion then moved on to identifying some possible approaches to overcoming these challenges.

Some possible approaches to overcoming challenges
- Must focus on the career continuum and create an environment where a person can develop and become employable during and beyond the PhD as an independent researcher.
- There should be defined exit strategies for PhDs researchers which can allow for a smoother transition to their next career step (academic or otherwise). How this is achieved in practice will require careful planning and implementation.
- Alumni networks should be used more effectively to assist with the transition from PhD to workplace.
- There should be greater engagement with small business and setting up agreements between these businesses and universities should become less administratively cumbersome.
- There should be defined methods to track a researcher's international experience.
- There should be a wider interpretation of research outputs to include more than traditional academic publications. However this should not mean that the quality of research is diminished.

Workshop Summary Three:

Joint doctoral programmes: Assessing the impact
***Professor Annamaria Silvana De Rosa**, Program Director European/International Joint Ph.D in Social Representations and Communication and of the So.Re.Com. THEmaticNETwork, Sapienza University Rome.*

Professor De Rosa presented a case study of the European/International Joint Doctorate in Social Representations and Communication of which she is the director. This programme has been running since 1993 and currently has 8 European partner institutions and 6 non-European partner institutions. It also has collaboration agreements with public and private organisations. It was explained that this programme has taken a centralised approach to administration. This means that the procedures for the doctorate are integrated and harmonised across the partner institutions. In addition, the physical mobility of doctoral students across the partner institutions has been complemented by an advanced level virtual campus. This offers a depository for scientific papers and outputs as well as space for interactive classrooms. The impact of this joint doctoral programme can be seen at individual, institutional and European levels.

Impact on the individual PhD researcher
- Access to a common web-platform shared with all other researchers on the programme
- Structured transferable training (virtual and physical through summer schools)
- International mobility
- Joint diploma - mutually recognised by both institutions and across the network
- Greater career opportunities - many have been employed in academia and in private organisations

Impact on institutions
- Greater access to international virtual and physical campus events and sharing of data
- Greater mobility for students
- Access to a range of different collaborations with industry and public organisations
- Innovative effect on administrative and academic procedures

Impact on Europe
- Increases mobility of researchers
- By integrating administrative procedures across the partner institutions guarantees greater sustainability and longevity of agreements

Quick Summary – Theme One

- A large range of key benefits of joint doctoral programmes can be identified for students, institutions and regions. However, to gain maximum benefit from these collaborations and to help overcome potential challenges, careful planning must be undertaken by all parties in advance.
- Sustained effort is required to reach a common understanding of the core value and purpose of the PhD in Europe, for instance based on strengthening the Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (PIDT).

Theme Two:

Encouraging and recording personal and professional development activities undertaken within and alongside a doctorate

Overview

Institutions are increasingly focused on how they can best support the broader personal and professional development of PhD researchers throughout their doctorate. This recognises that the researcher rather than the thesis/research is the primary output from the PhD. How do we therefore better support and encourage students to take active ownership of their broader development throughout their doctorate, preparing them for whatever their future holds? One of the workshops at the conference began to address this question by presenting three distinct approaches from the UK and Austria.

Workshop Summary Four:

Supporting personal and professional development throughout the PhD
Professor Alison Rodger, Director MOAC Doctoral Training Centre and Warwick Centre for Analytical Science, University of Warwick
Claire Nimmo, Researcher Development Manager, University of Strathclyde
Dr Bianca Lindorfer, Research Service and Career Development, Center for Doctoral studies, University of Vienna

This workshop began with short presentations of three different approaches to supporting personal and professional development of PhD researchers.

The new Postgraduate Certificate in Researcher Professional Development was launched at the beginning of academic year 2013/14 at the University of Strathclyde. The key aspects of this approach are here:

Key aspects of the University of Strathclyde Approach

- Unique approach which means all PhD researchers across all faculties can complete the PG CERT with a standardised credit requirement
- Flexible approach where there is no standard curriculum- allows the researcher to plan their own development.
- It is underpinned by and mapped on to the Vitae Researcher Development Framework
- Aims to increase employability and differentiate University of Strathclyde graduates in employment market.
- Gives researchers formal recognition for development activities.
- Aims to increase research effectiveness.

Some of the challenges of this approach are as follows:
- It involved two years of development and will require careful monitoring and tracking.
- Achieving buy-in from all staff (both academic and administrative)
- Encouraging and ensuring student engagement
- Ensuring equality of experience for part-time and off campus students

Link to the University of Strathclyde PGCERT webpages: https://www.strath.ac.uk/rdp/pgrcredits/

A University of Vienna pilot project into using PDP tools for PhD researchers was the focus of the next presentation. The key aspects of this approach are:

Key aspects of the University of Vienna Approach

- The rationale is both to reflect on current support for PhD researchers and to encourage them to reflect, plan and be proactive in their own development.
- A workshop was held for PhD researchers to analyse and build on existing PDP tools and to adapt the best one for their use. They were also asked to design an action plan.
- Feedback meeting found that the tools helped increase reflection and mean researchers were better able to articulate their skillset.
- The PDP workshop will now be included in the core training programme for PhDs.

Some challenges of this approach:
- Gaining the support of supervisors in the promotion of PDP.
- Student engagement in the process and questions of balancing compulsory and voluntary personal development planning.

Link to the University of Vienna project webpages: https://doktorat.univie.ac.at/en/activities-and-offers/cooperations-and-projects/empowering-doctoral-candidates/

The final presentation focused on the established and accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Transferable Skills in Science at the University of Warwick which currently has around 500 registered PhD researchers and around 60-70 researchers completing it per annum. The key aspects of this approach are:

Key aspects of the University of Warwick Approach

- Rationale is to help students recognise their skills and to use these to maximum effect in their research.
- Usual path structured as two modules each year over three years. This means one skills module and one optional module each year.
- All tasks must be signed off by supervisor or relevant academic.
- Researchers are expected to collate a portfolio of their work as evidence.
- Provides a formal list of evidence of skills for employers and acts as a reminder for researchers.

Some challenges of this approach are:
- Ensuring engagement of students
- Ensuring consistency and quality of delivery from course to course and from year to year
- Administrative workload

Link to the University of Warwick PGCERT webpages:
http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/pioneers/pgcts

Discussions following the presentations centred around the challenges of ensuring student and supervisor buy-in for schemes which are designed to promote and support the personal and professional development of PhD researchers. These were common challenges for all three of the approaches presented.

Suggestions for engaging students in personal and professional development schemes
- Ensuring provision is high quality and well supported by the institution
- There are incentives to participate. For example credit bearing, there is individual attention etc.
- There are light penalties for disengagement such as a black list for no shows, small charge for not attending etc.
- Ensuring flexibility in provision and variety in start times.
- Ensuring links between skills development and concrete actions.

Suggestions for engaging supervisors in personal and professional development schemes for PhD researchers
- Ensuring that processes and systems are as efficient as possible to support supervisors
- To provide supervisors with appropriate professional development support / training to support students
- Give evidence of the benefits of professional development
- Make training for supervisors meaningful and related to real-life research bids etc.
- Embed student support as an aspect in annual review

Quick Summary- Theme Two

- Despite institutional differences in approach to supporting the personal and professional development of PhD researchers, common challenges of engaging students and supervisors with the process can be identified. To overcome these, careful consideration needs to be made to training, information dissemination, quality assurance and administrative support.
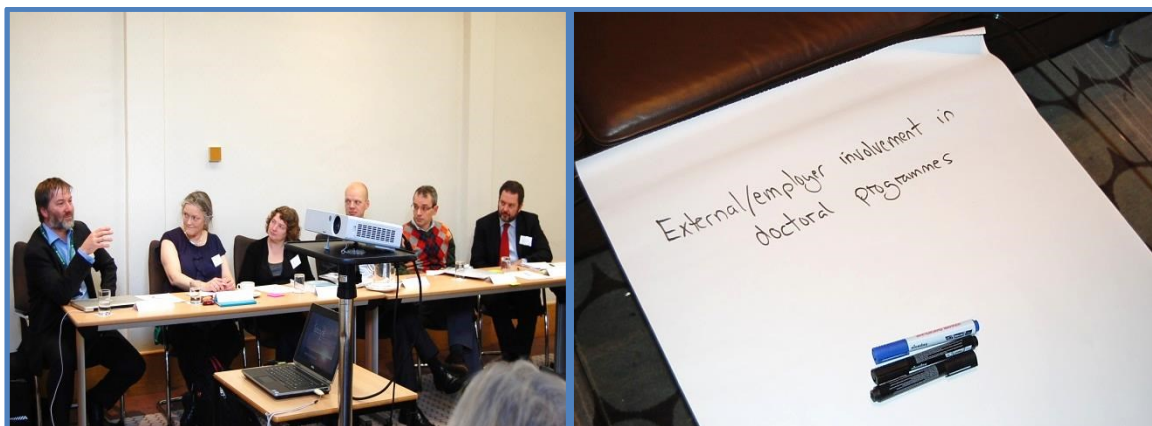
Overview

Over recent years employer engagement in doctoral programmes has become more prevalent. This is particularly through work placements and internships, but also through joint programmes with industry and public bodies. Despite this, there is still limited information on the longer term benefits of this for employer, institution and individual and it remains challenging for the main stakeholders – doctoral candidates, universities and employers. These stakeholders are often uncertain about how best to approach this engagement, how to understand the other side, and how to best make use of the opportunity. One of the workshops at the conference explored this and presented two different approaches to employer engagement, one from the Arts and Humanities and the other from Science and Engineering.

Workshop Summary Five:

Perspectives on employer engagement in doctoral programmes
Ruth Donnelly, *Assistant Director, Careers Service, University of Edinburgh*
Professor Stana Nenadic, *Professor of Social and Cultural History, University of Edinburgh*
Professor David Ingram*, Institute for Energy Systems, University of Edinburgh*

Ruth Donnelly from the Careers Service at the University of Edinburgh first set the context for this workshop which was designed to explore some of the opportunities and challenges of employer engagement in both the Sciences and the Arts.

Professor Nenadic then presented an overview of the AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Awards in the arts, heritage and culture Sector and Professor Ingram presented on the Industrial Doctoral Centre for Offshore Renewable Energy (IDCORE).

Some of the common benefits and challenges of employer engagement in doctoral programmes were identified as follows:

Benefits of employer engagement in doctoral programmes
- An opportunity for academics and students to broaden their horizons, to network and to gain insights into industry and the 'real world'.
- Can add to student employability, however the advantage in terms of seniority and salary benefits can vary depending on the sector. For example in engineering, industry positions tend to be more lucrative and senior than in the arts sector where positions in academia often award better pay.

Challenges of employer engagement in doctoral programmes
- It can be prohibitively bureaucratic and require a large administrative workload.
- Organisations who are particularly concerned about intellectual property (IP) will often be reluctant to take on PhD researchers.
- Limited number of industry partners – how can universities create more partnerships and in particular with small and medium enterprises (SMEs)?
- Sometimes encounter 'cultural attachment' issues. This is where the student's attachment to the university means industry practice is alienating or vice versa where the student becomes more attached to the external organisation and does not see the worth of the PhD.
- Timescale conflicts. Where universities plan in years, industry often plans in months.
- Can work placements be scaled up – should they be scaled up?

Some possible approaches to addressing these challenges
- Work on broadening the understanding of 'industry' within academia to clearly include all external organisations
- Collect concrete examples of work placements, the issues, funding etc. which can then be disseminated.
- Ensuring that PhD researchers have mentors in a company or institution to focus them on career development.
- Ensure that both parties have considered and discussed how the relationship will work prior to the student starting.
- Ensure ownership of the PhD researcher's project is decided at the beginning of the partnership.

Quick Summary – Theme Three

- Whether in Arts and Humanities or in the Sciences, the sector should embrace a broader interpretation of industry and employer engagement with doctoral programmes and priority should be placed on building frameworks which make partnerships between academia and employers easier to set up and develop.

Theme Four:

Approaches to training and support for doctoral candidates and supervisors

Overview

A key element of any doctoral education is effective and supportive supervision. However, frequently there are challenges to overcome in order to achieve this. Supervisor training and support for doctoral candidates needs to take these challenges into account. Three workshops at the conference explored different challenges for training and support for supervisors and PhD researchers. These were as follows: International doctoral supervision:

➢ Understandings, misunderstandings and monkeys;
➢ Supervising at a Distance: some approaches;
➢ Interdisciplinarity and Doctoral Programmes

Workshop Summary Six:

International doctoral supervision: Understandings, misunderstandings and monkeys
***Professor Tony Lynch**, Professor of Student Learning (English for Academic Purposes), English Language Teaching Centre, University of Edinburgh*

This workshop explored and challenged some of the assumptions, expectations and (mis) understandings which surround international doctoral supervision.

The workshop began with a focus on some of the fundamental questions and concerns which should be considered in any supervisory relationship.

Assumptions and interpretations
- Cannot expect that principles within the PhD experience are commonly understood by all supervisors and students in the same way
- Assumptions vary within same academic culture/ discipline/ institution/ individual
- Problems can arise from differences in the individuals' orientation (to thesis, to career, to individual)
- Mutual expectations will develop over time, but how does the student see these?
- The higher education institution provides a framework of assumptions about the process. But the lived supervision practice depends on how individual supervisor interprets. And how does the student know this?

The focus was then shifted to common misunderstandings in the supervisory relationship and the following points were mentioned:

Common misunderstandings
- Classic types of misunderstanding, for example about what individual's 'rights' are and about what is 'mentionable' in meetings/discussions
- Missing cues given by either student or supervisor (sometimes not taken up by student because being respectful/deferential)
- Reduced personality of the second-language learner; 'Free choice of actions depends on free access to convention'
- Misunderstanding at the micro level builds up to be our understanding of our students, for example, something as small as understanding what silence/laughter means in different ways from each other can contribute to our (mis) understanding of each other

Some advice for supervisors:
- Need to be prepared to negotiate meaning (possibility of staff training around this)
- Help new postgraduate researchers become aware of local assumptions
- Get PhD researchers to make notes on meetings (and send to supervisor to check understanding)

Workshop Summary Seven:

Supervising at a Distance: some approaches
Dr Siân Bayne, *Senior Lecturer, Education, Community and Society, University of Edinburgh*
Dr Christine Sinclair, *Lecturer in E-Learning, University of Edinburgh*

This workshop began by questioning what it means to be, 'distant'. The presenters emphasised that we should not consider an online option as second-best as many students are actively choosing this. The crucial aspect is to ensure that all students get the best possible educational experience.

The MSc in Digital Education at the University of Edinburgh was used as an example of a programme where distance supervision has been used. It incorporated the following elements:

- Built sense of group-space that is both synchronous and asynchronous
- Blogging - provides a written record of reflections and of supervision
- Google Hangouts
- Skype text-chats (students log-in at designated times)
- Moodle discussion boards
- Active Twitter feeds

Evaluation showed that student perceptions and experiences of this distance model focused on the following:

- Homing and the sentimental campus - 'virtual' home-coming (students cared a lot about campus/the University)

- Campus envy - a sense that proximity would somehow give others an advantage, or that the 'authentic' experience was at campus; campus and campus-orientated rituals (for example graduation) matter to students
- The nomadic & the domestic - students can be engaging from different spaces (for example kitchen at home, or five different cities across the world)
- Complex relationships

There are several issues which distance supervision can raise for supervisors:

Possible challenges and considerations for supervisors in a distance setting

- For joint PhDs, how do you ensure there is a genuine equality to the three way relationship? Does the at-distance supervisor have a weaker relationship? Does the student feel they are getting less from the at-distance supervisor? However, this can even occur if you're simply not in the same building. What happens if there's a difference of opinion between at-distance/face-to-face supervisor? Does the at-distance person have less influence/power?
- Are the pastoral elements at-distance more difficult? Different definitely. Written record may put-off some from mentioning in text. But enhancing provision through introducing processes such as e-Counselling, can benefit all students and some on-campus students may actually prefer this approach.
- Is it more difficult to assess underlying/non-presenting issues (what is not said) through at-distance media? This might encourage the use of a range of engagement mechanisms (video, audio, text)

The workshop then used a number of scenarios as a basis for discussion around distance supervision. Details of these are set out below:

What would you do if...? (These problems are actually true for both on-campus and at-distance)

1. *You don't hear from the student for months? (In contrast with expectations that were laid out)*
   Possible responses: Get in touch, lay-out clear actions required and consequences if not met.
2. *Students contact you all the time (How do you set boundaries of supervision when you can always be online?), e.g. every time you log onto Skype they get in touch.*
   Possible responses: On-campus students will tend to wait for supervision meeting. Can't email an off-campus student asking not to email - would appear be unsupportive. Setting boundaries at the beginning of the interaction. Recognise that this is part of the learning process - recognising that it is not an appropriate professional behaviour and this skill/attribute needs to be strengthened in the student.

3. *Nothing gets written by the student*
   Possible responses: No different than if in-person. Deal with through normal procedures.
4. *The supervisor and the student have a fundamental disagreement*
   Possible responses: Harder to patch-up at a distance therefore establishing a video link is important. Recognise that at-distance students are **still** part of an academic, scholarly community of the institution.

Workshop Summary Eight:

Interdisciplinarity and Doctoral Programmes
Professor Lise Wogensen Bach, Vice-Dean of Talent Development at Aarhus Faculty of Health Sciences, Aarhus University
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This workshop was facilitated by Professor Wogensen Bach who introduced the topic for discussion and the two presenters. Mara Götz is a PhD researcher at the University of Edinburgh and Jonas Kristoffer Lindeløv is completing a PhD at Aalborg and Aarhus Universities. They are both undertaking interdisciplinary research projects, one largely in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Mara Götz) and the other in Medicine and Philosophy (Jonas Kristoffer Lindeløv). Following the workshop discussions, the presenters co-authored a short paper which details some recommendations for interdisciplinary PhD research. These derive from their own experiences as well as discussion output from the workshop. The content of this paper is below.

Recommendations for Interdisciplinary Doctoral Programmes

Interdisciplinary doctorates present unique opportunities as well as challenges to students as well as to supervisors. In interdisciplinary research, a particular research question is answered drawing on knowledge and methods from multiple disciplines. Thus, the anchor of an interdisciplinary doctorate should not be thought of as any particular discipline but rather the research question should be the driving force of the work undertaken.

Problem-focused rather than discipline-focused:

1. **Academic title:** The title earned upon completing a doctorate should simply just be "doctor" without a discipline-specific postfix. The title of the doctorate thesis describes the doctor's area of expertise further. This practice would foreground the researcher as the main product of a doctorate, rather than the thesis itself. This is already the current practice in Spain.

2. **Thesis evaluators:** The evaluators of the doctorate should be chosen not by any particular discipline of expertise but by their expertise with respect to the research question. This would ensure that the thesis progresses on the core research question rather than merely answers to disciplinary habitus.

Interdisciplinary work inevitably involves the consultation of a much broader literature in order to identify appropriate knowledge and methods for solving the problem. As a result, supervisors and students frequently reach the boundaries of their own knowledge and consequently have to depend on others to a larger extent. This dependence can lead to fruitful collaborations if actively facilitated, but it may also be a major productivity blocker if not. Therefore:

Embed the doctorate student in a collaborative and interdisciplinary research environment:

1. **Physical proximity:** Ideally, the doctorate student should be physically proximate to experts in the disciplines that are relevant for the research question. Preferably, these expert colleagues reside in the same office spaces. Conference and workshop attendance in multiple fields should be actively encouraged.

2. **Credit collaboration:** In the evaluation of the doctorate thesis, results brought about by collaboration should be credited as an integral skill of interdisciplinary research and should be actively promoted.

3. **Multiple supervisors:** In some cases, multiple supervisors with different areas of expertise might be optimal to secure proper guidance on all relevant areas. Supervisors should collaborate closely in order to avoid that the student gets "caught in the middle" between supervisors with contradicting priorities.

4. **Policy alignment:** Finally, it is also vital to communicate clearly and well in advance on "smaller" issues such as citation practices, writing and formatting practices, in order to avoid digressions, delays or detrimental effects on the project

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Quick Summary- Theme Four

Frameworks for supervisory arrangements and researcher support and development should be built which recognise and support the increasing diversity in research and in researchers. These should take into account different cultural approaches and understandings, modes of study and effective support for interdisciplinary researchers.

Final Plenary

Panel:

Chair: *Dr Jon Turner,* Director of Institute for Academic Development, University of Edinburgh

Professor Johnny Laursen, Head of Graduate School, Arts, Aarhus University

Professor Annamaria Silvana de Rosa, Program Director European/International Joint Ph.D in Social Representations and Communication and of the So.Re.Com. THEmatic NETwork

Professor Dorothy Kelly, Vice-Rector for International Relations and Development Cooperation, University of Granada

Dr Kate Heal, Head of Research Training and Development, School of GeoSciences, University of Edinburgh

In keeping with the interactive and participatory nature of the conference, the final plenary session was structured to further some of the discussions from the sessions held over the preceding days. Delegates were requested to sit in groups around large round tables and were presented with the following task:

▪ Discuss <u>examples</u> you have gathered/ points you have learned on any of the conference themes. What do these mean (for individuals/ institutions etc.)?

▪ Identify **one recommendation** and **one question** for the panel

The panel was also asked to identify a recommendation and a question.

The recommendations made were as follows:

Recommendations made in the final plenary
1. Institutions should ensure that they have adequate resources for PhD management structures that support researcher and research development. These should be embedded in the institution at all levels. An example of this is the Aarhus University PhD planner.
2. In order to make PhD researchers more attractive to future employers, academia needs to better recognise the value of traditionally less academic 'products'. For example, blogging and media articles.
3. Institutions need to create and build systems which can effectively manage the diversity and complexity of research and researchers, particularly systems which facilitate and support interdisciplinary research.
4. Efforts should be made by policy makers to break the hourglass structure of research and higher education. This means facilitating better links between senior management and the research community so that there the flow of information is both bottom-up and top-down.

The questions and responses focused on four different, yet interrelated areas:

Cost/benefit of smaller doctoral programmes

Question: Given the time and resources required to set up smaller more expensive doctoral programmes is it worth it? What is the cost/benefit analysis?
Panel response: Yes, it is worth it. Smaller programmes can mean greater resources and time but also can act as pilots for larger programmes in the future.

European standardisation

Question: Will there be a cross-EU standardisation of doctoral degrees?
Panel response: Not an obvious need for increased homogenisation but rather increased understanding across EU of the varying practices.

After Horizon 2020

Question: Given the diversity and move from apprentice and master model to structured doctoral education, what is going to happen next (post Horizon 2020's focus on joint programmes)?
Panel response: Horizon 2020 is a funding scheme which means it is not designed to affect the future of the doctorate as a qualification but will probably have an effect on the behaviour of institutions. It will mean more employer engagement and collaboration between industry and institutions and between institutions. The danger is to assume that quality is always assured in doctorates and also to identify the added value of such collaborations for the supervisor and the PhD researcher.

Supervisor support

Question: How can we better promote and support supervisors in dealing with diversity of research and researchers (different cultures/different disciplines etc.)?
Response: First, we need to properly recognise that we are fighting cultural differences - the PhD experience that the supervisor went through and may have thrived under is not necessarily appropriate now. Then we can start to build up appropriate support mechanisms.

Feedback from Conference Participants

Shortly after the conference, delegates were sent a feedback survey to complete. Responses revealed that participants felt there were many positive elements to the event. In particular, the opportunities to network and discuss issues with a wide range of colleagues were highlighted. The possibilities to share best practice and to learn about different approaches from across Europe were also mentioned as valuable aspects of the conference. In general, responses showed that the most positively rated workshops were those with the highest degree of interactivity and those which used real-life examples. Some respondents would have appreciated more information on the practicalities of joint degrees and on European funding for doctoral studies.

Useful Links and Documentation

The following links and documents are useful background information on the themes of the conference.

General

European Commission (2013) *European Research Area Progress Report*. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/research/era/pdf/era_progress_report2013/era_progress_report2013.pdf

European Commission DG Research and Innovation. COM (2012) 392: *A Reinforced European Research Area Partnership for Excellence and Growth.* Available at: *http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/era-communication_en.pdf*

Doctoral Training and Support

European Commission (2011) *Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training (PIDT)*. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Principles_for_Innovative_Doctoral_Training.pdf

Research Councils UK (RCUK) (2013) *Statement on Expectations of Doctoral Training*. Available at: http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/RCUK-prod/assets/documents/skills/statementofexpectation.pdf

Research Councils UK (RCUK) (2013) *Statement on Joint vision for Collaborative Training*. Available at: http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/RCUK-prod/assets/documents/skills/rcdvision.pdf

Researcher Mobility

MORE2 project webpages: Mobility Patterns and Career Paths of EU Researchers. http://www.more-2.eu/www/

Excellence in European Doctoral Education (ExEDE)

A joint project between the University of Edinburgh and Aarhus University

More information on the ExEDE pilot project can be found on the project webpages:
http://www.au.dk/en/doctoralexcellenceexede/doctoralexcellence/